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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the increase in school violence, California recently enacted the Hughes Bill that requires a positive behavioral intervention plan for individuals with exceptional needs. Although special education teachers are required to develop positive behavioral intervention plans, most have not been trained in the skills necessary to develop or implement goals or objectives. This paper describes how to build a positive behavioral plan to bring about lasting positive changes in an individual's behavior. The steps to building a plan are: (1) describe the learner; (2) define the behaviors of concern; (3) conduct an assessment; and (4) develop replacement positive behaviors. The paper argues that teachers who make plans without the collaborative efforts of the counselor may solve the short-term needs of students without teaching lifelong coping and social skills. The skills that teach the child to interact in a positive way at school are skills that can prepare him or her for success in all settings. (JDM)

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Positive Behavior Intervention for Emotionally Disturbed Children: The Counselor as Team Leader

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Introduction: The Hughes Bill

Recognizing the increase of violence in schools and following the death of a student after being restrained, California enacted the Hughes Bill. The Hughes Bill's intention is to provide positive behavioral interventions. It requires a Positive Behavioral Intervention Plan for individuals with exceptional needs with a **"serious behavior problem."** A **"serious behavior problem"** is defined by the regulations as "the individual's behaviors which are self-injurious, assaultive, or causing property damage which could lead to suspension or expulsion pursuant to Ed. Code Section 48900(f) and other severe behavior problems that are pervasive and are maladaptive that require a systematic and frequent application of behavioral interventions" [§3001(y)].

- Emergency procedures should be applied only when safety requires them, and they must not be used as either consequences or punishment or in lieu of a systematic positive behavioral intervention plan.

The Hughes Bill defines **"behavioral intervention"** as the "systematic implementation of procedures that result in lasting positive changes in the individual's behavior. Behavioral interventions are designed to provide the individual with greater access to a variety of community settings, social contacts and public events; and ensure the individual's right to placement in the LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) as outlined in the individual's IEP (Individual Educational Plan). Behavioral interventions do not include procedures that cause pain or trauma. Behavioral interventions respect the individual's human dignity and personal privacy. Such interventions shall ensure the individual's physical freedom, social interaction, and individual choice."

However, the Hughes Bill does not provide for a plan to implement positive behavioral intervention plans. School districts were expected to develop their own methods of implementation to comply with the new law by 1993. Although special education teachers are required to develop plans to meet the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students, most have not been trained in the skills necessary to develop or implement goals or objectives. These are actual referrals from special education teachers to counselors from a Northern California school district:

1. Told him not to call me "man." Loud and disruptive - begging for a referral.

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2. I tried to get him to work. He insulted me saying, "Yah, you're sorry all right." He called me a faggot - twice.
3. Reading aloud during silent reading. Says she'll forget if she doesn't read out loud."

When a teacher sends a student out of the room, what does it teach? It is common that teachers react to a crisis by restraining or removing the child without teaching a positive replacement behavior. The child who refuses to take a test or do an assignment may not be defiant; most likely he is not prepared or an emotional crisis is interfering. The child's underlying communication is ignored. This is successful for the child because it removes him from the stressful situation; it is successful for the teacher because it removes the teacher's perception of the problem, the child. The tragedy is that whatever caused the problem behavior remains unsolved within the child. The teacher just doesn't have to deal with it.

Counselors must serve as team leaders to train or provide trainers to address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children in all settings. They must educate teachers, parents, administrators and support services personnel in developing positive behavioral intervention plans that teach:

1. understanding another's perspective
2. communication skills
3. consequences
4. conflict resolution
5. concern for the rights of others.

Counselors must assist all team members to learn, relearn and learn again the essential components of Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans:

The Philosophy of Positive Interventions
Prevention as Best Practice
Building A Positive Behavioral Plan
Developing Goals and Objectives
Assessing and Modifying the Plan

An examination of these critical components reveals a heavy reliance on theoretical principles drawn from learning/behaviorist theory, social learning theory, and the philosophy and teaching practices of Maria Montessori. An understanding of the philosophy underlying positive interventions should serve as the foundation for many educational and counseling practices, not just behavioral interventions. Montessori's concepts of the prepared environment, individualized educational plans, setting up the child for success and the teacher facilitating the child's link with the environment all support this philosophy.

For seriously emotionally disturbed students, it is absolutely critical that positive intervention plans include teaching new behaviors that meet the communicative need of the disruptive behaviors.

Philosophy Of Positive Interventions

(From Wright, et al., 1994, p.2)

- Behavior is communicative and goal directed.
- Settings and environments should be capable of meeting the student's needs before behavioral interventi are used. Behavioral interventions should not be used to force conformity in inappropriate settings.
- The primary goal of any classroom is to educate and teach effective interpersonal skills, not to manage c suppress behavior.

- Behavioral interventions should consider the developmental level and chronological age of the student.
- Behavioral interventions should be developed collaboratively.
- Behavioral intervention plans should be efficient and minimally intrusive in terms of time, labor and complexity.
- Interventions should focus on teaching appropriate behavior to replace maladaptive behavior.

Prevention As Best Practice

- Any changes required to provide a meaningful, accessible and appropriate curriculum and environment should be made before an attempt is made to directly modify the student's behavior.
- The behavior goals should be reasonable and attainable for the student and the goals should be implemented within the context of meaningful instructional activities.
- The primary benefit should be for the student. The student should be taught effective personal skills that may be used across settings. An intervention that focuses on eliminating a maladaptive behavior without regard to the purpose it may serve the student is not a positive behavioral intervention.

Building A Positive Behavioral Plan

1. **Describe the learner.**

2. Identify and operationally **define the behavior(s)** of concern.
   - The behaviors must be specific, measurable and observable.

3. **Conduct assessments**. Assessment begins with:
   - Direct observation
   - Interviews
   - Review of Available Data

   Using these sources, the assessment includes:
   - Systematic **observation of the occurrence** of the targeted behavior.
     - definition
     - frequency
     - duration
     - intensity
   - Systematic observation of the immediate **antecedent** events.
   - Systematic observation and analysis of the **consequences** to determine the function the behavior serves the individual.
     - communicative intent
   - **Ecological analysis** of the settings.
     - physical setting
     - social setting

- activities and nature of instruction
- scheduling
- communication between individual and staff and other students
- degree of independence
- degree of participation
- amount and quality of social interaction
- degree of choice
- varieties of activities

- **Health and medical factors**

- Review the **history** of the behavior
  - effectiveness of previous behavioral interventions

4. Use the assessment to develop a **Positive Behavioral Intervention Plan**.

Developing Goals And Objectives For The Positive Behavioral Plan

The intervention plan should include:

- A **summary** of the information gathered in the behavior analysis.

- An objective and measurable **description** of the targeted maladaptive behavior(s) and replacement positive behaviors.

  - Targeted maladaptive behavior: Freddy responds to frustration by punching walls and kicking objects and screaming angry statements, "I hate this school. Fuck this. Fucking teachers," in all classroom environmen on an average of two times a day.
  - Replacement positive behaviors: In response to situations that Freddy finds frustrating, Freddy will verbally express his frustration, "I can't do this. I don't want to do this. I don't understand this." Instead of kicking o punching inanimate objects, Freddy will remove himself until he can express his frustration verbally in an appropriate manner, i.e. without using profanities..

- **Goals and Objectives**

  - Goal and objective for the **problem behavior**: "Freddy will not engage in screaming profanities or angry statements when frustrated or kicking objects in the classroom."

  - Goal and objective for **positive replacement behavior**: "Each time Freddy feels frustrated in a classroom. he will tell the teacher what is causing the frustration and seek to negotiate a solution."

  - The **behaviors are specified**. The plan tells where they will be measured and indicates that they are to occu every time a situation becomes frustrating to Freddy.

- Detailed description of the **behavioral interventions** to be used and the circumstances for their use.

  - **Different teaching techniques** that are to be employed to teach alternative positive behaviors **based on the assessment** of the problem behavior.

- How the **environment will be changed**.

- How **direct treatment strategies** are to be used and what **reinforcers** are suggested to increase or maintain alternative positive behaviors.

    - Inadequate: Freddy will be taught appropriate ways to handle frustration.
    - Adequate: Freddy will be instructed in specific procedures to follow when he feels frustrated and has a need to protest during all classes. These instruction techniques will include role-playing appropriate verbal expressions of frustration with his curriculum support class and modeling. Freddy will be instructed in removing himself physically when he is angry or frustrated and feels he is about to punch or kick walls. He will be instructed as to an appropriate area to use in each class for a "time-out." His voluntary "time-outs" will have a maximum time limit of 10 minutes during the first month and will be reduced in time each week thereafter until "time-outs" are no longer necessary. When Freddy is able to express his frustration appropriately, he will negotiate an alternate or modified assignment or assistance in doing the original assignment. Using an intermittent reinforcement schedule, Freddy will be given "Head of the line" passes for using positive replacement behaviors.

Assessing And Modifying The Plan

- Is the problem decreasing?
- Does the new behavior meet the communicative needs of the student?
- Is the positive replacement behavior increasing?
- Are the instructional techniques effective or do they need modification?
- Are the reinforcers working to eliminate the problem behavior and maintain or increase the replacement behavior?
- Has enough time elapsed to assess the plan?
- Have we met our goal to teach understanding another's perspective, communication, conflict resolution, accepting consequences, and concern for the rights of others?

In conclusion, although teachers may be expected to have the training to develop Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans, without the counselor as a collaborative leader of the team working with the child, plans are too often based on what is least disruptive to the fewest number of people. Immediate results take precedence over the teaching of lifelong coping and social skills. These skills which teach the child to interact in a positive way at school are skills that can prepare him for success in all settings.

Unfortunately, not all children will respond to positive intervention plans despite collaborative efforts. If a child continues to be dangerous to himself and/or others, the counselor must be prepared to support the school, teachers, parents and the child to accept that more restrictive measures may be necessary.

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